Harvard Allston Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 26, 2006
Honan-Allston Library
6:30 p.m.

I. Attendance:

Harvard Allston Task Force
Paul Berkeley
Mary Helen Black
John Cusack
Rita DiGesse
Brian Golden
Michael Hanlon
Brighton Lew
Millie Hollum McLaughlin
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone
Tim Norton

Boston Redevelopment Authority
Gerald Autler
Linda Kowalcky

Boston Transportation Department
Adam Shulman

Harvard University
John Audi
Harris Band
Jim Barrows
Will Donham
Chris Gordon
Gary Hammer
Kevin McCluskey
Maureen McDonough
Dan Rabinovitz
Kathy Spiegelman

Behnisch Architects
Stefan Behnisch

Gerald Autler called the meeting to order at approximately 6:35 p.m. and introduced Kathy Spiegelman.

Kathy introduced members of the Harvard team in attendance, and turned the floor over to Chris Gordon, who in turn introduced Stefan Behnisch of Behnisch Architects. Behnisch Architects is the firm that Harvard has selected to design the proposed first science complex on Western Avenue.

Stefan explained that Harvard's design competition for the new science complex did not ask architects to submit a proposed building design, but rather to show how a science/laboratory

building could connect to the larger campus and, in turn, to the neighborhood. He observed that a number of different design characteristics help to determine how successfully a building connects with its environment.

Scale: Stefan stated that Harvard's existing campus reflects a greater diversity of building styles/materials than many people realize, and that it is the scale of buildings, rather than a single style or building material, that creates a sense of consistency. Most buildings in Harvard Yard, for example are human-scaled buildings of approximately 4-to-5 stories.

Stefan went on to observe that the dormitory buildings at the Harvard Business School campus represent a human scale that is appropriate for their setting. He stated that as one moves closer to Western Avenue, buildings could be larger and still be of an appropriate scale for their setting. He mentioned the Polaroid Building on Memorial Drive in Cambridge as an appropriately-scaled larger building that is adjacent to a major street. As one moves closer to the Mass. Turnpike, buildings could be slightly taller in order to help shield the campus and community from the Turnpike. Then, as one moves closer to the existing residential neighborhood, the size of buildings should decrease in order to be more compatible with a residential scale.

Open Space: In addition, Harvard's existing campus is characterized by a succession of individual open spaces defined by their surrounding buildings. Open spaces on the Business School campus tend to be more enclosed than do the open spaces on the Cambridge campus, but pedestrians on both campuses have the feeling of moving from one defined open space to another. The facades of the individual buildings surrounding the open space act as "wallpaper" for the open space.

Public Realm: Stefan showed slides of some successful public spaces around the world and stated that in order to achieve a lively public realm, public spaces cannot be dominated by the automobile. The worst case scenario for public spaces is when all visitors arrive by car, drive into a parking garage, and "disappear" from the public realm.

In addition, it is not sufficient to think that retail uses alone will create a lively public realm. Successful public spaces must have activities in addition to retail—and should be characterized by a density of uses and a sense of protection, or definition of cohesive outdoor spaces. Stefan said that Harvard Yard and Harvard Square are lively spaces in part due to the close proximity of many different uses/activities, including the University, the subway station, shopping, restaurants, residential and office uses, and recreational amenities.

Stefan views the proposed science complex site on Western Avenue as an opportunity to bring together public and university functions. For example, the complex could house retail and/or other publicly-accessible functions at the street level, and could include open courtyards or other green spaces that could serve as a meeting place for building occupants and others.

Sustainability: Stefan showed images of other buildings designed by his firm, and stated that sustainability is of key importance in his buildings. He feels it is desirable to bring green spaces into the buildings by providing interior gardens and creating opportunities for natural light to permeate interior spaces.

One way of achieving this is to create a complex of grouped buildings linked by connections, rather than a single large building. This approach also helps to maintain an appropriate human scale for larger buildings.

Stefan pointed out that the façade of the building should be viewed as a functional element, not simply as exterior cladding or decoration. Balconies with plantings can help to control interior temperatures and reduce energy costs. Operable windows with screens can improve the comfort level for occupants and help make the best use of natural light.

Since laboratory buildings often have large mechanical penthouses, these structures must be treated as part of the façade rather than as a separate mechanical appendage.

Paul commented that the presence of cupolas and bell towers on Harvard's existing buildings helps tie the campus together visually—particularly when viewed from a vantage point such as the top of Harvard Stadium. He asked if there had been any thought to what could tie the new Allston campus together visually in a similar manner 50 year from now.

Stefan agreed that tall elements can be effective as orientation points, and that taller structures (not necessarily tall buildings, per se) may be appropriate to help unify the new campus.

Ray stated that the first science complex will set a precedent for the future new buildings on the Allston Campus, and asked how the science complex is expected to relate to future development. Stefan replied that his firm will be working closely with Cooper Robertson and Partners, the firm that is developing the campus master plan, and that that such coordination will be important to ensure consistency between the first building and future buildings. Ray stated that the neighborhood views Harvard's One Western Avenue building as a mistake in that it does not tie into the larger campus.

Millie said that from her perspective, many people in the neighborhood would like to see some traditional elements in Harvard's future architecture. She also thought that parents of prospective Harvard students would want to see some of the traditional Harvard architectural expressions as part of the new campus.

Stefan stated that designs have not been developed yet for the new science complex, but that it is his belief that building facades must relate to what is happening in the interior of the building. He acknowledged that he is not a "traditionalist" architect and that the new science complex would not try to replicate the historic appearance of the Business School campus, but at the same time, it would not be appropriate to design an outlandish or shocking structure that would not connect to the future campus design or the existing neighborhood.

Brian Golden said he felt that his participation in the public design review processes for One Western Avenue and for the Honan-Allston Library had been very instructive. Although he was opposed to the height originally proposed for the One Western Avenue building, for example, he now thinks the building would have been more attractive had it been taller. Similarly, although he and others in the community originally expressed concerns about the design for the Honan-Allston Library, the community now thinks it is a beautiful building.

Chris Gordon said that the challenge for Stefan Behnisch (as well as for the architects who will design other buildings for the new Allston campus) is to help define what the "new" Harvard will

look like. The new science complex, for example, can't look like a wild spaceship, but it also can't be a replica of a 400-year-old building.

Ray said he believes that process and concept are the most important elements in defining the new design for Harvard, and based on Stefan's presentation, he thinks the proposed ideas make sense.

Kathy indicated that upcoming discussions with Stefan will focus a great deal on how the old and the new will merge, and how the first science complex and the design guidelines being developed as part of the master plan will mesh with one another.

Millie reiterated that the community was initially fearful of the design for the Honan Library, but that everyone has learned a lot as a result of that process.

John Cusack said he liked Stefan's presentation and agreed that the first science complex would set a precedent for future development. He observed that a variety of building styles will help to provide a sense of orientation for the campus, and that if the campus were to have nothing but rectangular red brick buildings, there would be no sense of orientation.

Mike Hanlon asked how parking would be handled for the new science complex. Stefan replied that appropriate parking would be provided, but that the parking should be hidden from view, most likely in an underground garage.

Kathy stated that the area around the existing science site currently has about 1,000 surface parking spaces, many associated with the WGBH uses that will soon be moving to new facilities in Brighton. She said there is an opportunity as part of the first science project to build an underground garage that could serve not only the science complex, but also some of the future campus build-out. Most of the spaces in such a garage would represent a replacement of the currently-existing surface spaces rather than a creation of "new" spaces. Another alternative would be to create only enough spaces for the first science complex, but it would be very difficult to go back at a future date and try to expand the garage after the science complex is constructed.

Paul asked if the science complex and the rest of the new campus would have an underground tunnel system like the one at the Harvard Business School. Kathy replied that there is likely to be a tunnel system for utilities, but probably not for pedestrian circulation.

Paul asked if there are any underground streams or drainage running through the property. Kathy replied that she wasn't aware of any underground streams, per se, but that Harvard does know where the existing drainage systems are located.

An outline of Harvard's proposed Institutional Master Plan Notification Form (IMPNF)—to be filed on April 28th—was distributed to the Task Force and other attendees. Gerald explained that the IMPNF would initiate the process to amend Harvard's current Allston Campus Institutional Master Plan (IMP) to accommodate the proposed science complex, the art museum uses at the former Citizen's Bank and Kinko's properties, and some temporary arts and culture uses at the former Verizon building in Barry's Corner. Gerald stated that while the proposed projects would be treated as an amendment to Harvard's existing IMP, the BRA would not issue its final approval on the amendment until Harvard submits an IMPNF for the larger Phase I master plan.

Paul asked if there would be a discussion about community benefits associated with the new projects, since the benefits described in Harvard's existing IMP don't take into account the projects that are now proposed. Kathy responded that the IMP amendment process will include a discussion of community benefits.

Ray stated that he was originally opposed to the idea of an IMP amendment to accommodate the new projects as he felt that these projects should be evaluated within the larger context of Harvard's proposed development. However, he is in favor of allowing the new science complex to proceed. He has decided to support the IMP amendment approach as long as the BRA requires Harvard to present a broader planning vision for the new Allston campus before the proposed amendment is approved.

Kathy went over the IMPNF/amendment outline that was distributed, and stated that the request includes the science and arts projects that were announced in February, as well as a proposed temporary home for arts/culture uses in the former Verizon Building. She stated that the types of uses that are anticipated for the Verizon Building would include opportunities for artists in the community as well.

Mary Helen asked if Harvard expected to appoint a community liaison for purposes of the community arts uses, and expressed an interest in serving in this role. Kathy thanked her and indicated that such assistance would be very helpful.

Mike asked if there was anything new to report with regard to the Charlesview negotiations, and Kathy replied that there were no updates to report at this time.

Paul asked about some construction vehicles that he has observed around 6:00-7:00 a.m. lined-up and idling around the Harvard Stadium. Why are they there? Kevin McCluskey said he would look into it and get back to Paul. Paul also asked about a pile of dirt near the Little League field, and Kevin indicated that it is likely associated with Harvard's clean-up of the field in preparation for opening day.

Gerald stated that the next meeting would be on Monday, May 8th, and that he would not be able to attend that meeting. The subject of the meeting will be transportation. Harvard will make a presentation and Adam Shulman from the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) will discuss BTD's role in the BRA review process.

Minutes from the April 10th meeting were distributed at the beginning of the meeting. John moved to accept the minutes and Rita seconded the motion. The minutes were approved as presented.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:20 p.m.